

# A new lease of life

*A more pragmatic approach to regeneration could improve Hong Kong's existing building infrastructure while breathing new life into older communities and developments.*

Jane Ram



**Sr Vincent Ho, JP**

Past President of the HKIS  
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An old shop on Man On Street in Tai Kok Tsui, an area of intended redevelopment under URA plans.

Photo: Nora Tam/SCMP

*“Some of these older districts have as much as 50 or even 100 years of history. We should embrace these old communities and cherish them.”*

Historically, Hong Kong has paid scant attention to community development. The pressure for new housing has always been so great that other considerations rarely entered the picture. Recently, however, local politicians and planners alike have been increasingly concerned about fostering community spirit. Consequently, diverse aspects of community regeneration have become hot topics. This requires a new mindset for everyone involved in building development and redevelopment, including professional surveyors.

Urban regeneration is far from being a new concept. Major disasters such as Japan's Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 or Darwin's Hurricane Tracy in 1974 inadvertently created the opportunity to restructure entire communities. But in Hong Kong, regeneration is generally building-specific. Sr Vincent Ho, a past president of the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors and Chairman of the Institute's Building Policy Panel, would like to see more emphasis on upgrading instead of redeveloping dilapidated buildings and, equally importantly, he would like to see more emphasis on the district context.

Regeneration is generally understood to mean tearing down old buildings and redeveloping the site into something more modern. But it also refers to in situ improvements in conditions, appearance and amenities to bring a dilapidated structure into line with current standards and expectations, Ho says. The acquisition of old buildings, he adds, calls for a wide range of expertise, with improved conditions and added facilities leading to higher rental value and the upgrades of entire districts.

“We should consider bringing new ‘software’ into the building rather than simply replacing the ‘hardware’,” Ho says. “We should consider adding functions and services that are appropriate for the inhabitants. In general, old buildings have poor services; the community is typically elderly and building regeneration can help improve living conditions and the overall environment.”

Ho notes that redevelopment need not be the only route. Instead of demolishing and rebuilding, he advocates improving facilities and enhancing existing buildings whenever possible. Even a building of only a few storeys provides plenty of scope for improvement and possible expansion: a new lift or an additional floor, or improving windows and facades to make them more energy efficient and in line with current trends, can all make life better for the residents, he says.

“It should be possible to keep the existing residents, improve the appearance of the building and retain the feel of the existing neighbourhood, which is probably still largely intact,” he says. “Add services that will be available to the community as a whole – social services, health care facilities and gathering spaces for the elderly. In old traditional districts, many people have a long association with the area.” But he is also of the opinion that, over time, new families will move in, so authorities should think about providing kindergartens to encourage young families to revitalise the neighbourhood and attract residents of newer nearby developments.

Areas like Ma Tau Wai, Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong, Sai Wan and even older parts of Causeway Bay and Shau Kei Wan are ripe for regeneration. “Some of these older districts have as much as 50 or even 100 years of history. We should embrace these old communities and cherish them.”

Hong Kong's current housing situation and legislation discourage redevelopment in high-density areas, Ho points out. If the plot ratio is already at or around 6.0, there is little incentive for redeveloping old buildings. It is a better strategy to think in terms of prolonging their life, keeping them viable for another decade or two.

“But in such cases we should help regenerate the community by providing a better environment. Hygiene is an issue and so are community relationships. However, if the buildings are beyond reasonable repair, someone will probably purchase them to convert into sub-divided flats. And if the structure is too dilapidated, then sometimes we have to accept that redevelopment is the only way.”

Ho suggests that surveyors and others involved in such projects should consider introducing or adopting new concepts of community regeneration or enhancement. In general, elderly occupants are probably not very well off. Space can be rented out to generate revenue that might go to community use or for upgrading existing facilities. If the government can facilitate the process by making it possible to add more area within the site, or perhaps an additional top floor or half floor – even a new lift – it will be possible to incorporate local community facilities like a clinic or kindergarten. These can generate revenue, add open space for the community to enjoy, or make areas like rooftops more accessible for all.

“Inhabitants should be encouraged to make more use of such precious but neglected space,” Ho says. “Most of these old buildings are walk-ups or they have antiquated and unreliable lifts.”

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Ho would like to see the government adopting a more pragmatic approach to space and facilities to encourage enhancement of the building's value. Changes in building regulations to create extra area would make it possible to bring a 50- or 60-year-old building up to modern standards. He would also like to see new regulations and standards allowing alterations or additions of the sort that currently face many obstacles. Floor loading, fire escapes and other structural considerations are based on old standards. Existing building design should be rethought to permit a makeover and an upgrade for such facilities as fire sprinklers, hoses and hydrants plus a sizeable water tank.

“Some land leases might have restricted the land use to residential. If new policy may allow addition of shop or office space in a flexible manner, some buildings may acquire substantial commercial value to support their improvement.”

Noting that surveyors are experts in building control and land management, Ho says that, if incentives are allowed by new policy, they can initiate some changes and modifications to help residents. Owners would be more willing to allow upgrading and co-operate if they can see direct benefit to themselves in terms of higher value, or lower energy consumption following the installation of new outer walls. “We are not talking about gimmicks when we speak of new concepts to enhance a building's value. We are looking at fixing the building so that repairs are not needed to drains, water pipes and other structural elements for quite a few years, as well as making improvements to external wall treatments – paint or tiles – and window treatments.”

Older buildings are often affected by advanced material decay – water pipes and drainpipes are outdated and corroded with serious hygiene problems. Staircases need improvement and leaking roofs must be fixed to extend the building's lifespan. For Ho, regeneration means more than beautifying the building to increase its value – it's also a question of improving functionality and maintenance, plus adding new services and facilities. “Owners need to be aware of the need for regular maintenance to keep the building in good condition. As surveyors, one of our special streams is to provide guidance in the management and upkeep of buildings to avoid problems due to neglect. We also keep owners aware of changing building regulations and land-use restrictions.”

The government and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) are both involved in regeneration, but historically, Ho says, projects have been building-specific, ignoring districts as a whole. He points out that recent comments about revitalising old buildings have paid little attention to such matters as the common infrastructure of the district. “We need to understand the background, the roots and needs of people and consider how to make their lives more enjoyable,” he says. “The government cannot underwrite such schemes – they have to be undertaken by private enterprise. However, incentives should be granted by the government to drive things along.”

Holistic approaches are rare, however. For instance, Ho thinks that if there is a small parcel of government land on a corner or at the centre of a building complex, it should be possible to incorporate it into the overall plan and use it to enhance life and add to residents' enjoyment. But this land is most probably under the authority of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and its resources are limited. Standard features – a few benches or a small formal garden – might be added, but these are not really used by residents.

Authorities might consider other uses like a local clinic or elderly gathering space and find someone to operate and manage it as a commercial venture. It's not the speciality of surveyors, Ho acknowledges, but he says surveyors need to focus on this aspect, bringing in more “software” instead of focusing exclusively on “hardware”.

“Building regeneration is not a mainstream concept, and there are many legal and administrative obstacles. We need to be more innovative and think about how we can enhance interlinked buildings, making the district safer for children and elderly people alike. We should think about how to create community circulation. I'd like to see pedestrian footbridges linking old buildings to give access from block to block, tying them together with nearby buildings to create a community among different buildings. It can't all be done by the owners. Surveyors could be the catalyst for change.”

“URA has recently announced a study in an old district to figure out the possibility of plot-ratio transfer or plot-ratio reserve in urban redevelopment projects. Riding on this study, I see an opportunity to bring in more flexible density control to those existing old buildings to generate a new life for them through rehabilitation and extension.”

*The article is published courtesy of Classified Post.*

「有些舊區已有 50 年甚至 100 年歷史，我們在改造的同時要好好珍惜這些舊社區。」

# 活化舊區

以新策略重塑舊區，除了改善香港舊樓設施，要同時為舊社區注入新的動力。

Jane Ram

香港過往在舊區重建工作中都把焦點放在房屋重建，因而忽略社區發展。然而，社會最近開始關注培養社區精神，如何保留及重塑社區更成為城中熱話。相關持份者包括專業測量師在內都需要以一種新思維去參與舊區發展及重建。

城市重建並非全新概念。1923 年的日本關東大地震，以及 1974 年颱風崔西吹襲澳洲達爾文市等意外事件，無意中創造

了一個社區重建的機會。然而，香港的市區重建項目一般只以收購、拆卸及重建舊有樓宇的模式進行。香港測量師學會前會長兼建築政策小組主席何鉅業測量師希望本港的重建項目能更著重「改善」而非只單純「重建」舊樓，並期望地區周圍環境亦能受到關注。

社會普遍認為重建等於拆毀舊建築，並在原址重新興建現代的建築物，但何鉅業說，「重建」亦應包括改善原有樓宇的狀況、外觀及配套設施，使原本破舊的建築能符合當前的標準及期望。他補充道，收購舊樓涉及各方專業知識，如同時加入一些改善樓宇及增加配套設施工程則可提高租賃價值並改善整個地區環境。

何鉅業表示：「我們應考慮為樓宇引入新『軟件』，而非單單替換『硬件』，應加設適合居民生活的功能及服務。一般來說，舊樓的配套設施較差；而居民多為長者，「更新」可幫助他們改善生活條件和整體環境。」

何鉅業認為傳統的重建並非唯一選擇。他主張盡量改善現有的樓宇設施，而非只是拆除及重建，即使是樓高數層的唐樓，亦有很大的改善及擴展空間，如加設升降機或加建一層、半



市建局重建具百年歷史的中環街市，嘉咸街商戶和顧客面對新轉變。

Photo: Sam Tsang/SCMP

「我們需要了解居民的背景、家庭及需要，並思考如何改善居民的生活質素。」

層面積，或改善窗戶和外牆，使樓宇更為節能環保，同時符合現代需求，這些都可為居民帶來更美好的生活。

他說：「要留住現有居民、改善樓宇外觀及保留那些尚存的社區結構。關鍵是要增加社區服務，包括社會服務、保健設施及長者聯誼空間。在傳統舊區，許多居民都與社區建立了深厚感情。」但他認為，隨著更多新家庭搬入，當局應考慮開設幼稚園，鼓勵年輕家庭定居，為鄰里加添活力，同時吸引附近新發展項目的居民融入社區。

馬頭圍、深水埗、觀塘、西環等地區，以至銅鑼灣及筲箕灣部分較舊的區域均有更新的空間。「有些舊區已有 50 年甚至 100 年歷史，我們應該接受並好好珍惜這些舊有社區文化。」

何鉅業指，香港目前的建築法例窒礙了已經高度發展地區的重建。若地積比率已達至六倍或以上，重建舊樓的可行性不大。較好的做法是延長樓宇壽命、樓宇可持續 10 年至 20 年的使用。

「改善現有舊樓內部狀況之餘，亦應提供更好的整體居住環境，方可重塑社區。如何改善衛生和社區關係都是重要的考慮。不過，樓宇過度失修，不排除有人會收購這類樓宇，再以『劏房』形式出租，製造另一個難題。若樓宇太過殘舊，重建便是唯一的方法。」

何鉅業建議測量師及其他人士，多加考慮採納社區重建或優化的概念。這類舊區的長者業主一般生活並不富裕，如可在現有樓宇內創造一些額外空間並以社區服務用途出租/出售，再將所得收入投放社區發展或提升現有設施。若政府容許增加一些樓宇面積作新增用途，例如加建一層頂樓或半層樓，甚至加設升降機，這些措施都可促進社區升級，並引入診所或幼稚園等社區配套設施。這些設施能帶來收益、增加社區公共空間，改善天台空間使居民出入更為方便。

何鉅業表示：「因為大部分舊樓只有樓梯或舊式升降機，所以一些寶貴的空間也被遺忘。通過改造，我們可鼓勵居民多善用這些空間。」

他希望政府通過政策推動，增加空間和設施，從而提高樓宇價值。修改建築規例，可提升 50 或 60 年樓齡建築物的樓宇面積，以推動提升樓宇設施標準。目前涉及改建或加建樓宇的工程面對許多障礙，他希望新的規例及標準允許進行這類工程。現時樓宇的樓面負載、走火通道及其他結構上的考慮均按照舊標準而定。當局應重新考慮現有的樓宇設計，以便優化灑水系統、消防喉轆及消防栓等設施，容許加裝較容量的水箱。

「可能有些地契只容許住宅用途。如新政策可容許一些樓宇加設商店及辦公室，增加大廈的商業價值，並以此補貼一些改善工程的成本。」

何鉅業指，測量師是樓宇管制及土地管理的專家，如有新政策配合，他們可以想出方法推動業主進行樓宇改造工程。當業主眼見安裝新外牆能提升樓宇價值或節省能源，他們會很樂意參與樓宇優化。「提高樓宇價值並非噱頭。修復樓宇可省卻其他將來的維修工作，例如不需經常維修排水渠、水管及其他樓宇結構，同時改善了外牆和窗戶的安全及效能。」

舊樓常面對材料老化的問題，例如水管及排水管已過時和腐蝕，出現嚴重的衛生問題。改良樓梯設計，以及解決天台滲漏的問題，都能延長樓宇壽命。何鉅業認為，重建不僅是美化樓宇以提高樓宇價值，還包括改善樓宇功能及保養，以及增加配套及設施。「業主要注意定期維修，保持樓宇的良好狀況。作為測量師，我們特別需要就樓宇的管理及維修提供指導，避免業主因疏忽而出現問題。我們亦可向業主提供有關樓宇規例及土地使用限制的專業意見。」

何鉅業說，政府及市區重建局均參與樓宇重建，但工程項目過往一直集中於建築物本身，而忽略整個地區。他引述近期有關舊區重建的意見，認為項目很少關注地區基建等事宜。「我們需要了解居民的背景、家庭及需要，並思考如何改善居民的生活質素。與其依賴政府，私營企業應牽頭執行這類計劃，但政府應給予誘因，推動有關發展。」

然而，目前未見當局推出全面的方案。何鉅業舉例說，若在一些舊樓重建項目旁邊有一小片政府土地，當局可把該土地納入整體計劃，藉此增加重建空間及開放給整區居民使用，以提高居民的生活質素。例如一些由康樂及文化事務署管轄的土地，因資源有限，最多只能設置幾張長椅或一個小型公園，實用價值不高。

當局可考慮其他方案，例如在有關土地開設地區診所或增設長者聯誼空間，並與企業接洽如何經營及管理這些設施。何鉅業承認，這並非測量師的專業範疇，但他認為測量師需關注這方面的事情，為社區重建引入更多「軟件」，而非只是專注改善「硬件」。

「樓宇更新並非主流概念，而且尚有許多法律及行政難題。我們需要以創新的思維，思考如何加強樓宇之間的連接，為兒童及長者提供更安全的地區環境，以及如何加強社區的連接性。我建議行人天橋能連接舊樓，方便居民出入，將鄰近的建築物連結成為一個社區。這不可能單靠業主完成，測量師起著一個重要的推動作用。」

市建局最近宣佈進行舊區研究，了解在市區重建項目中，轉移或儲存地積比率的可行性。這項研究有機會為當局引入靈活的建築密度管制，令現有舊樓重獲新生，延長壽命。

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